

**Oral History Interview with**

**MILTON KNAPP**

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At Skyland Conference Hall  
66<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter  
of the  
Civilian Conservation Corps

Interviewer: Carrie Janey

Transcribed by: Gloria Updyke

Shenandoah National Park  
Luray, VA

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## INDEX

	<u>page</u>
Arriving at Camp	2
Auburn, Alabama	1
Avington, Illinois	3
Baseball	5
Basketball	5
Big Stone Gap, VA	1
CCC Chapter 127	4
CCC, finding out about	1
CCC, gains from	4
Chevacla State Park, Camp SP-12	2
Daytona Beach, FL	1
East Peoria, Illinois	1
Fleet Reserve Association	3
Jobs in CCC	2
Massachusetts	3
Navy	3,5
Number of men in the Camp	6
Opelika, Alabama, going in to local towns	5
Pay	5
Social events	5
Soil erosion camp, Auburn	3
St. Louis, Missouri	4
Virginia	4
Virginia Beach, VA	3
Volunteer work, current	4
Washington D.C.	4
Wiers, NH	3
Yorktown National Park	4

## Transcription

CJ: Mr. Knapp, you've read the oral history deed of gift and signed that, is that correct?

MK: That's right. Uh huh.

CJ: Alright, then let's get started. Can you tell me where you were born?

MK: Born in East Peoria, Illinois.

CJ: In Illinois? And who were your parents?

MK: Uh, David H. Knapp and Mabel Knapp.

CJ: Uh huh. And what did they do for a living?

MK: Well my dad used to work on the railroad, until they had the strike. And then they, they moved from East Peoria and went to Daytona Beach, Florida because my grandfather run a campground down there. The first one ever in Daytona Beach.

CJ: So you moved far away to Florida?

MK: Yeah, Florida.

CJ: And when were you born?

MK: January 26, 1918.

CJ: 1918. And when'd you move to Florida?

MK: Uh when I was 7 years old.

CJ: Ok. When you were 7? Ok.

MK: 6 or 7, 7 years I say. Uh huh.

CJ: Ok, and um when did you first hear about the CCC? Were you in Florida at the time?

MK: Oh I was in Florida. I was in high school and everything. And when I got out of high school and things were looking bleak and everything, they're only paying a dollar a day and there's nothing around. So friends, 4 or 5 of us together, I heard them talking. They mentioned the 3 C's, I looked it over and went down

and joined up. The 4 of them went to Big Stone Gap, Virginia and I wound up in Auburn, Alabama.

CJ: So where did you enlist?

MK: Uh, Daytona Beach, uh huh.

CJ: Daytona Beach? And they sent you all the way to Alabama?

MK: Uh huh.

CJ: So the Depression was pretty hard?

MK: It was at that time. 1935. Uh huh.

CJ: So when you got to, did you have any physical conditioning before you went?

MK: No, none whatsoever. Big, strong, dumb and happy.

CJ: You just went straight to camp? So what did you do when you got to camp?

MK: Well they lined us up, gave us shots, all kinds of shots such as that, explained what it was all about, assigned us barracks and a bunk. And from there, they lined us up. We called it stores in the navy. They called it quartermaster. So they issued those uh, World War I outfits, clothes such as that. Then after that they assigned us work crews and like that and then they introduce us to the mess hall with uh, food was real good. Yeah. From there on it was a daily routine.

CJ: So what were your jobs while you were there?

MK: Well uh, worked as, different jobs. One was one deck gang with a water boy. Then the next day we was working on roads, such as that. I was working, picks and shovels. Then one time I was a truck driver. And just before that, we was making stone, uh cabins like you people have here. But ours were out of all native stone.

CJ: Oh really.

MK: They'd be for the superintendent of the park, such as that. Maybe his home.

CJ: Now what was the park?

MK: Chevacla, Chevacla State Park. And they called it SP-12.

CJ: Ok. SP-12. And that was your camp.

MK: Right. It was about 20 miles or so out of Auburn, Alabama. Going toward Tuskegee.

CJ: So were there a couple different camps within that park?

MK: No, just the one, just the one. What they had, they had what they called a soil erosion camp on the edge of Auburn, but uh...

CJ: Did you ever work with them?

MK: No we never worked with them. We worked just mainly in the State Park. Building roads and bridges, uh cabins, fire trails, and different types of things, uh huh.

CJ: Uh huh. So you went in '35.

MK: Went in in '35, come out in '39.

CJ: So you were in for quite awhile then.

MK: 3 ½ years. Uh huh.

CJ: Seems like a lot of the boys were only in for a year. They were only allowed to be in for a year. So how old were you when you enlisted then?

MK: 17, goin' on 18. Uh huh.

CJ: So what did you do after you left the CCC?

MK: After I left the CC? Went back home. Nothin' there, so wound up, a friend of mine, we went to the Wiers, New Hampshire working in a hotel. And after the summer there, went back to Illinois working on my uncle's farm, and then from there I went to a factory in a little town called Avington, Illinois. Stayed there about a year and a half. And then things were getting hot over in Europe, so I joined the Navy. And from there on spent 30 years in the Navy.

CJ: And that's how you got to Virginia?

MK: Right. Uh huh. When I married my wife, she didn't want to go to, she was from Massachusetts, and I didn't want to go to back to Massachusetts. And not being from Florida, she didn't want to go there. So we settled in Virginia Beach, Virginia. On account of you had all of your benefits there. Your medical, and your commissaries, your exchanges and everything. So up until that day after I retired I just uh, worked in the Navy yard, and after that I retired. And I worked

with what they called Fleet Reserve Association. Volunteer work and things like that. Done a little odd jobs.

CJ: Now tell me a little bit more about the uh, group that your with, the CCC group that meets down there.

MK: Well, we're Chapter 127, belongs to the national CC, and we meet once a month, and we do various things. We hold a meetin' and a get together and then they have a luncheon. And then we have volunteers for various work, like Seashores State Park, and other things like that. And then uh, the group'll go visit over in Yorktown. They've been working for the last 10 years. There's a group of them's been working in Yorktown National Park there. Working in the cemetery, and uh.

CJ: Mm hmm.

MK: Working in the uh, remodeling the uh, carriages for the cannons. And various odd things.

CJ: That's wonderful.

MK: Uh huh. They get over there, just tell stories, and tell what they do. And explain what camps they've been in, and explain their experience.

CJ: Are they mostly from that area then?

MK: Most of them are from there, yeah. Uh huh, lot of them, most of them retired out of the army. A couple, three out of the Navy, and some that had never been in any service whatever.

CJ: Oh, really?

MK: Uh huh. The national is out of St. Louis, Missouri. Where it first started was out here in Virginia, there next to Washington D.C., but they moved it out there because it's more centrally located. And they put out a journal every month explaining, also tells about different camps, experiences such as that. Very interesting, uh huh.

CJ: What did you gain from your CCC experience?

MK: What I gained? Well ... about 20 pounds. (laughing). No, uh, good discipline, good companionship, various things like that. How to take orders, and uh, learn really, uh how to work.

CJ: Did you use any of those skills in any work that you did later on.

MK: Not really, uh huh. I did around the house, this and that. But when I went in the Navy, I went a different way. I went in what we called Gunnery Ordinance, working on the big guns.

CJ: Ok. So would you do it all over again?

MK: Well I guess I would, there. The way the circumstances is and everything. But like today, I might go in and get my uh, your schooling, scholarship there, and get out. But at that time they didn't have anything.. If you could get a scholarship, you's lucky. And then at that time, things was tight, so the \$25 dollars that went home, kind of helped the family, over the hump.

CJ: And you got to keep \$5?

MK: Yeah, we got that. And then later on they sent \$22 home and we got \$8.

CJ: So did you take your money and go in to any local towns?

MK: Oh yeah, we went into Opelika Alabama and we went into Auburn, uh huh.

CJ: So you had a lot of social events too?

MK: Well they used to try once a month have dances and bring some of the girls from the college out there.

CJ: Did anyone marry any of the girls that they met?

MK: I assume they did, but uh I don't recall.

CJ: We have a lot of that from, from the guys here at Shenandoah. Were you in any sports?

MK: Oh yeah, I played baseball, basketball. Yeah we had a good baseball team. One year we wound up in, out in Kansas in the semi-pro league. Uh huh.

CJ: Really?

MK: And then we played basketball, we played different towns, and played uh, a lot of the college, in the college there, the fraternity brothers there. And then in the baseball, we played different uh, all the plates under the college teams they had, I'd say freshmen teams, you know, not varsity. And then in a few of the little towns around there, we played baseball with them. Yeah we had a pretty good baseball team. Our basketball team was average.

CJ: About how many guys were in the camp?

MK: Hmm. Let's see now. I guess it must have been about 30 to 40. I mean, I mean 300 to 400. We had quite a few there. We had about 5 barracks. Uh huh.

CJ: So you had quite a few guys.

MK: Uh huh.

CJ: Ok, well thank you for taking the time to ...